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AMBASSADOR BUTENIS' REMARKS FOR THE 231st INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION

Dhaka -- The following remarks were delivered by Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis on June 14th at the American Embassy's Independence Day Celebration.

(Begin text)

Chief Guest Dr. A.B. Mirza Md. Azizul Islam; Ambassadors; distinguished guests, friends, and colleagues – As Salaam–u–Aleikum, and good evening. I am delighted to see so many of you here today for an early celebration of American independence. This event has special meaning for me since it is the last time I will have the opportunity and the honor to speak formally as the United States ambassador to Bangladesh.

American Independence Day is July 4, but today, June 14, is also an important day in the United States. It is Flag Day. As many of you may know: the 13 stripes on the American flag represent our original 13 colonies and the fifty stars represent the fifty current states. We have a motto e pluribus unum – “from many one” and that applies not only to our states, but also to our diverse inhabitants. We Americans, including those in the Embassy community, trace our roots to Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas – and our faith traditions include Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. We are all Americans. We are defined as Americans, not by race or creed, but by our shared beliefs.

Thomas Jefferson laid out some of those beliefs in our Declaration of Independence 231 years ago:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

It is true that we have not always lived up to our ideals: after independence, there was still slavery in the United States for almost a hundred years, and women gained the political right to vote only in the early twentieth century, but we continue to strive to more fully realize our ideals.

Furthermore, we believe that these ideals are universal. We believe that fundamental rights and democracy are not uniquely American, but are important to all people no matter where they happen to live. We also believe that it is our role as Americans to promote and share these values. As President Bush recently said:

“We will lead the cause of freedom, justice, and hope, because both our values and our interests demand it.”

During my time here in Bangladesh, I have been impressed by how deeply Americans and Bangladeshis share common values. We both pride ourselves on our diversity and our traditions of tolerance and moderation. We both have deep love for family and democracy.

It is in the interest of the United States that Bangladesh be a free, prosperous, and democratic country. Everything we care about in Bangladesh, from counterterrorism to counter-poverty, hinges on sustainable democratic growth. I hope you will agree with me that this vision for Bangladesh is also the vision of the people and government of Bangladesh.

As I depart Bangladesh, I would like to say how much I have been touched by the openness and friendliness of everyone I have met here, whether it is in the halls of power Dhaka, the market stalls of Rajshahi, the business houses of Chittagong, the tea fields of Sylhet, or the riverine communities of the Sunderbans. I will always remember Bangladeshis as cultured, friendly, hard working people with open minds and open homes.

If I have ever offended any of you, either by her words or deeds, let me say that everything I said or did was offered in the true spirit of friendship, partnership, and mutual respect. Please remember that I never spoken on behalf of the BNP, the Awami League, or any other party or faction, but in support of democratic concepts and democratic practices.

If I may offer one regret as I complete my tenure as ambassador, it is that I leave Bangladesh without having had the opportunity to witness free, fair, and credible elections. I hope everyone in this room will support efforts to reform the political process and to restore democracy to Bangladesh as soon as possible.

Thank you and good evening.

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Note: A Bangla translation of this article is also available from the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section (Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: DhakaPA@state.gov; Website: [http:// dhaka.usembassy.gov](http://dhaka.usembassy.gov))